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SUBJECT: UNORTHODOX POLITICS CONTRIBUTE TO MOSCOW-KIEV
TENSION

Classified By: Charge Eric Rubin: 1.4 (b, d).

¶1. (C) Summary. While newly arrived Ukrainian Amb Konstantyn Gryshchenko told Charge on August 1 that relations with Russia were serious, MFA Director for the Second Department of the CIS Countries (Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine) Sorokin told us on August 1 that Yushchenko was responsible for ratcheting up political tensions, in a bilateral relationship that enjoyed deep economic ballast. Sorokin detailed Russian unhappiness with Ukraine's visa ban on Duma deputy Zatulin, handling of the Black Sea Fleet's disposition, and conduct of the 1020 celebration of Orthodoxy, for which Gryshchenko was convoked on July 26. Yushchenko's reception (or lack thereof) of Aleksey II has generated negative public and official comment, although the Russian Orthodox Church has pocketed the Constantinople Patriarch's silence on Ukrainian Orthodox independence as a "victory." We see no Russian inclination to step back from its strategy of sharpening the political dividing lines with the Yushchenko government. End Summary.
New Ukrainian Ambassador Underscores Serious Rift

¶2. (C) In an August 1 meeting with the Charge, newly arrived Ukrainian Ambassador to Russia Konstantyn Gryshchenko, accompanied by Political Counselor Myroslava Scherbatiuk, described the situation between Ukraine and Russia as &serious.8 Gryshchenko, who was convoked by First Deputy Prime Minister Denisov on July 26 to hear Russian dissatisfaction over the bilateral relationship, predicted that autumn would see more strains, with the GOR perhaps seeking to renegotiate the Big Treaty that frames the two states, relations. Arguing that the U.S. was preoccupied with the presidential elections and the EU distracted by the Irish rejection of the Lisbon Treaty, Gryshchenko concluded that Ukraine would not get the support it needed when dealing with Russia. In response to Charge's affirmation of unwavering U.S. support for Ukrainian sovereignty, Gryshchenko acknowledged that Ukraine viewed the Big Treaty as just an amalgamation of agreements and accepted international law. Such rights as the inviolability of borders, Gryshchenko said, were guaranteed by international law, not the Big Treaty.

¶3. (C) Gryshchenko remarked that, after the Orange Revolution, all levels of Russian government, from the Presidential Administration to regional governors, were concerned by Ukraine's possible NATO membership and agreed with Charge's assessment that many ordinary Russians remained concerned by the prospect as well. Gryshchenko said many Russians still questioned the limits of Ukrainian independence, and continued to use the outdated preposition &na8 rather than &v8 when speaking about Ukraine, despite the GOU's requests. Before having to cut the meeting short on emergency business, Gryshchenko argued that Kyiv would have to determine whether or not it should actively pursue a NATO MAP offer, and the Russian wrath that it incurred, at a time when the Germans were adamant in their opposition.

Gryshchenko noted the propaganda coup that a German veto presented, with Moscow able to argue that NATO does not really want Ukraine, so Ukraine should therefore pursue close ties with Russia.

MFA Blames Yushchenko for Artificial Crisis

¶3. (C) In a separate August 1 meeting, Director of the Second Department of the CIS Countries (Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine) Viktor Sorokin declined to characterize Ukrainian-Russian relations as having worsened significantly, but questioned the timing of Yushchenko's actions and his strategy towards Russia. Sorokin repeatedly underscored the breadth of the bilateral relationship, pointing to 30 billion usd in trade that was expected to grow another 15 percent this year. &Even if we wanted to,⁸ Sorokin stressed, &the business community would not let us disrupt ties with Ukraine.⁸ Sorokin dismissed a freeze in the relationship, noting Tymoshenko,s July visit, her upcoming September meeting with Putin, and the resumption of the intergovernmental meetings in the fall. Noting that August was dacha season, and not a time for subcommittee sessions, Sorokin sidestepped a direct question over whether the five Black Sea Fleet-related working groups were on hiatus, as a result of Russian unhappiness over recent GOU pronouncements. Instead, he reaffirmed a resumption of diplomatic engagement in the fall.

¶4. (C) Praising Gryshchenko) a Soviet-era colleague of Sorokin,s) as a &serious professional⁸ and &skilled diplomat,⁸ Sorokin laid the blame for the recent sharpening of rhetoric on Yushchenko,s actions, with Gryshchenko,s

July 26 convocation driven by Russian unhappiness over the prohibition against Deputy Chairman of the Duma Committee on CIS Affairs and Relations with Compatriots Konstantin Zatulin's entry into Ukraine for one year, Ukraine,s posture on the disposition of the Black Sea Fleet, and the handling of the 1020 celebration of Orthodoxy.

Zatulin,s Expulsion Inappropriate

¶5. (C) Sorokin said there was real irritation over Ukraine,s continued reliance on blacklists, noting that Zatulin had been in Kyiv for a conference, before suddenly being expelled as a threat to Ukrainian sovereignty. (Note: This is the third time Zatulin has been PNG'd.) Coupled with Ukraine's previous PNG designation for Moscow Mayor Yuriy Luzhkov, Kiev was only creating barriers to future cooperation. Sorokin reiterated that the blame for these actions rested with Ukraine, since Moscow does not maintain black lists, which were in contradiction of a past agreement with Ukraine to annul diplomatic bans. Noting Moscow's previous warnings to the GOU not to exacerbate the bilateral situation, Sorokin argued that that Zatulin,s comments, however odious to Kyiv, were protected speech and did not reflect Russian official positions.

Black Sea Fleet Pronouncements Premature

¶6. (C) Sorokin reiterated that the disposition of the Black Sea Fleet was secure through 2017 and that Yushchenko's decision to announcement deliberations over its withdrawal now could only be interpreted as a deliberate diplomatic provocation. Whether or not the Black Sea Fleet was withdrawn, it would not be a decision negotiated now by Yushchenko, particularly since the Treaty was structured in a way that presumed automatic extension. Russia,s position, Sorokin commented, was to reaffirm publicly that it would not negotiate in 2008 the modalities of 2017, particularly with a Ukrainian government that was in a state of continual political collapse. (Note: The Russian MFA previously expressed its opposition to the base falling into NATO hands.)

¶7. (C) Sorokin criticized Yushchenko and the GOU for manipulating the July 25-27 religious celebrations in Kiev as an opportunity to create a political rift with Russia and to engineer an artificial schism between Ukrainian and Russian Orthodox believers. In a secular state, Sorokin argued, it was awkward to discuss religion and as a routine matter the MFA did not seek to utilize the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) nor religious celebrations for political purposes. (Note: FM Lavrov has highlighted the unity of the MFA and ROC in promoting Russian culture and ties to a broader Orthodox diaspora.) Sorokin, drawing from conversations with ROC leaders, told us that the ROC did not oppose a united Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) in principle; however, any united Ukrainian church must agree canonically with the ROC. Ukraine's lack of respect for Moscow, demonstrated by the absence of discussion with Russia's political and religious leadership over a potential split, complicated any unification efforts. "We cannot conduct meetings on church matters under the current conditions, and Ukraine's politicization of the religious festival did not facilitate discussion," Sorokin explained.

¶8. (C) Sorokin expressed dismay at Ukraine's reception of ROC Patriarch Aleksey II. MFA intervention, he maintained, had helped secure a GOU delegation headed by Rada Speaker Volodymyr Lytvyn to the airport to greet Aleksey II, after Yushchenko, former president of Ukraine Leonid Kravchuk, and Ukrainian Defense Minister Yuriy Yekhanurov had done the tarmac honors for Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople. (Note: According to press reports, Yushchenko initially approached Aleksey II to arrange a joint reception for him and Patriarch Bartholomew in Kiev in the run-up to the anniversary of the baptism. Aleksey II declined the offer. Circumventing established practice, Yushchenko invited Patriarch Bartholomew to Kiev without the Moscow Patriarch's permission and made personal pleas to Bartholomew for the Constantinople Patriarchate (CP) to recognize a united Ukrainian Orthodox Church. On June 23, Russian media reported that Ukrainian officials banned all posters and billboards with Aleksey II's picture in Kiev, threatening to cancel advertising licenses for agencies that did not follow orders. Conversely, Russian media reported that advertisements and signs supporting Bartholomew appeared two weeks before the celebration throughout Kiev.)

¶9. (C) Sorokin pointed to the disparity in treatment of the Patriarchs, as well as Yushchenko's public bid for UOC independence, as another conscious strategy to sour relations between the Russian and Ukrainian people. Just as a majority of Ukrainians did not support NATO membership, a majority of Ukrainian Orthodox did not support Yushchenko's ecclesiastical efforts. Sorokin cited statistics, indicating the ROC has attracted the most followers in Ukraine with 11,233 parishes and 9,217 priests. In comparison, the KP boasted 2,963 parishes and 2,940 priests while the UAOC had 1,178 parishes and 661 priests. Shrugging his shoulders at the disrespect of Aleksey II and political maneuvering of Yushchenko, Sorokin stressed that "Bartholomew has little influence in Russia and Ukraine."

ROC: Bloodied but Victorious?

¶10. (C) The perceived politicization of religious events in Kiev has stoked the ire of Russian Orthodox leaders and press channels alike. "Rossiya" news, pointing to Yushchenko's personal reception of Patriarch Bartholomew at the Kiev airport, called the lack of reception for Patriarch Aleksey II "indignant." Bartholomew's attendance with Yushchenko at a service held for the victims of the 1930s famine in Ukraine also raised hackles, with Aleksey II's decision to boycott consistent with previous ROC objections to politicizing historical events. Russian press even bristled at the fact that Ukrainian officials housed Bartholomew in one of

Yushchenko's presidential estates, while placing Aleksey in a three-star hotel named "Rus." Metropolitan Kirill, Head of External Relations for the ROC, played up the politicization of Yushchenko's invitation of Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople in a July 30 press conference. Noting that a split has been created under the influence of political forces, and it continues to remain a weapon, a club in the hands of political forces,⁸ Kirill expressed confidence that &politically motivated events in Kyiv⁸ would not undermine the Church, which had persevered on its own for over 2,000 years, despite numerous cataclysms, without a change in its canonical status.

¶11. (C) Russian ROC officials and the media have scored Bartholomew's careful comments and silence on the question of Constantinople serving as a jurisdictional umbrella for Ukraine as a victory for the Moscow Patriarchate. Kirill characterized the events in Kiev as a triumph of Orthodoxy during his press conference, stating that "nothing dangerous and terrible for the religious life of Ukraine and for the integrity for our Church has happened." While the ROC and Constantinople Patriarchate (CP) had discussed the issue of Ukraine's jurisdiction and would continue working on an agreed agenda for future discussions, Kirill argued that any accommodation in the canonical foundation for a schism was impossible. He warned, however, that forces wishing to undermine the ROC exist, and anything could happen to the ROC when religion is as politicized as it was in Kiev. Kirill lauded ROC supporters for their attendance at a liturgy and rock concert in Kiev during the celebrations, adding that the people proclaimed they have only one leader, Patriarch Aleksey II.

Comment

¶12. (C) We can expect Russia to keep sharpening the lines of political division with a Ukrainian government that has anchored its political agenda to NATO membership. Political commentators and politicians with access to the Kremlin tell us that Russia is winning a public relations war in Ukraine. While their conclusions may be fanciful, we do not sense any fundamental recalculation of Russian strategy towards Kyiv over the near-term.

RUBIN